



## **Japan Tsunami Debris Information A Focus on the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands February 2012**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) Region 9 and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) continue to collaborate with Federal and State partners as well as external stakeholders to assess and monitor the movement of the Japan tsunami debris. Because computer models predicted that debris might begin impacting Midway Atoll and the other Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) now (February 2012), recent efforts have focused on monitoring/detection strategies in the vicinity of these islands. Preparations are also being made for the possibility of some Japan tsunami marine debris (JTMD) reaching the U.S. West Coast and Alaska by 2013.

### **Recent Activities:**

- USEPA continues discussions with the US Navy regarding possible assistance with debris sighting in other parts of the NWHI and also is exploring options for tracking the debris as it moves closer to the West Coast of the U.S. mainland.
- US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) continues systematic shoreline monitoring and removal of debris on Sand and Eastern Islands on Midway Atoll. No debris which can be attributed to the tsunami has been sighted thus far.
- NOAA is working to obtain high-resolution satellite imagery capable of detecting possible tsunami debris in the open ocean.
- NOAA continues to refine its modeling forecasts of the movement of the marine debris generated by the tsunami and to compare the forecasts to those of others, including researchers at the University of Hawaii's International Pacific Research Center and Japan's Kyoto University. Much uncertainty remains regarding how much marine debris was generated by the tsunami and how much of that debris sank.
- NOAA has developed an assessment and response framework for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, which includes various subject matter

expert (SME) groups. The first workshop bringing the experts together to develop contingency plans was held in Honolulu on January 19th. Federal agencies, including USEPA, USFWS and USCG, as well as Hawaii State and county agencies and academia participated in the workshop.

- Federal, CA State, and local agencies met on February 14 at the California Emergency Management Agencies (Cal EMA) State Operations Center to begin interagency coordination and preparation for potential impact of the Japan tsunami marine debris expected to start arriving on the west coast of the U.S. early in 2013. Agencies who met included Cal EMA, California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal EPA), USEPA, Federal Emergency Management Agency, US Coast Guard, NOAA, CA Coastal Commission, CA Department of Public Health, CA State Parks, county hazardous materials (hazmat) departments, and other agencies with an interest in participating in a coordinated effort to address the potential impacts of JTMD. As a result of the meeting a Multi-Agency Coordination Group (MACG) will form, led by Cal EPA, which will adopt protocols for assessing the debris, including determining any potential contamination, and disposal options. Meeting participants agreed the potential for any unknown hazards, including radiation-contaminated debris, is very low; nonetheless, unknown hazard and radiation screening and assessment will be a part of the protocol development. The MACG will disseminate the adopted protocols to local responders.

### **For more information:**

The NOAA Marine Debris Program (MDP) can provide information to individuals or groups interested in undertaking shoreline monitoring studies for Japan tsunami marine debris. Effective monitoring of changes in environmental conditions, such as the abundance of marine debris, requires a good deal of forethought. For more information or to request a copy of the NOAA MDP Shoreline Survey Field Guide visit <http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/info/japanfaqs.html#monitor>

NOAA Japan Tsunami Debris FAQ's

<http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/info/japanfaqs.html>

EPA Region 9 Marine Debris

<http://www.epa.gov/region9/marine-debris/>

International Pacific Research Center – Tsunami Debris Models

[http://iprc.soest.hawaii.edu/news/marine\\_and\\_tsunami\\_debris\\_news.php](http://iprc.soest.hawaii.edu/news/marine_and_tsunami_debris_news.php)